

NSC BRIEFING

20 January 1955

"STRAINS" IN SOVIET LEADERSHIP

I. Because US studies smallest scraps evidence touching on stability Soviet regime, even minor "straws in wind" attract our attention. Recently, such "straws"--appearing with increasing frequency--suggest all is not sweetness and light in Soviet "collective leadership."

A. Publicity treatment Party First Secretary Khrushchev strikingly preferential in past months.

B. He, rather than Premier Malenkov, has been official spokesman on such hot problems as.

1. Soviet agricultural expansion,  
~~program and manpower allocated to~~  
~~program~~
2. Lagging construction program,
3. Anti-religious activities.

Internal Affairs:

1. Led delegation to Beijing.
2. Has talked freely to diplomats and visitors, to evident disquietude of Foreign Minister Molotov.

D. Has been built up by means taken history.

1. Example-- listed among Lenin's "closest associates" during civil war (untrue).

E. Set new date for annual Lenin celebration (in eyes of people, ties him both to new holiday and to "revered leader").

F. Boasts of closeness to Stalin--"I proposed (Bachelor Tax Law) to Comrade Stalin... that law was drafted and confirmed."

II. In contrast, Premier Malenkov has made no major policy pronouncement since April 1954

(last Supreme  
Khrushchev)

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A. Malenkov's only solo publicity during '54 (New Year answers to US news agency's questions) played down in propaganda, compared to year before.

III. Despite this contrast, Moscow observers unanimously agree Malenkov top dog when leaders seen together.

A. Attlee delegation--Malenkov "first among equals."

B. Ambassador Bohlen--"two most important men...are Malenkov and Khrushchev, in that order."

IV. We believe that preservation "collective leadership" probably still priority interest of top leaders as matter self-preservation.

A. "Straws in wind" show difference between present regime and Stalin's, when "empire building" by subordinates was fatal.

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- B. In contrast, "collegial" regime seems willing permit such maneuvering in hopes situation will correct itself.
  - C. Apparently greater leeway for individual action could prove source of strength for regime due resultant improved Soviet decision-making.
  - D. In any case, dangerous for us to hope for serious dislocations of regime merely on basis indications maneuvering within leadership.